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RECOLLECTIONS AND LETTERS OF GRANT.

PART I.

MY early recollections of General Grant extend from the time he was six or seven years of age, in 1828, or one year later, to the autumn of 1836. During that time we lived within three hundred yards of each other in the small village of Georgetown, the county seat of Brown County, Ohio. From proximity, and perhaps from other causes, our association was intimate. When we were so small that we had the belief that in a much-swollen stream there must be a superabundance of fish, we were engaged with hook and line in an attempt to catch them. He ventured out on a barked poplar log, very slippery from the rain ; in an instant his feet were in the air, and he disappeared in the turbulent, muddy water. I rushed down the stream some thirty feet, where it narrowed, and willows partly undermined bent over the stream nearly to the surface of the water. Out upon one of these willows I clambered quickly, and grabbing my young companion as he was borne down by the swift current, helped him to reach the bank. It is not unlikely that this incident would have been entirely forgotten by me had he not worn at that time a Marseilles upper garment with red stripes, buttoning on the nether garment, as worn by children. It seemed to me so superb, that I was filled with regret that it should thus be irretrievably ruined. In the following pages a letter from General Grant, when at Nice, will be quoted, which alludes to this incident.

His mother at that time was perhaps thirty years of age, above medium height, graceful in manner, gracious to children, neat in person, and kept her children neatly clothed, which was rather unusual in that part of the world at that time. In after years the General told me that he had never seen his mother shed a tear ; she had a cheerful countenance, a kind word to all, and in my eyes was very handsome, and, in reality, certainly was at least very prepossessing and agreeable.

As a boy, General Grant was never aggressive nor given to profanity, a vice that was not unusual with many of his companions. If provoked or insulted he would fight it out manfully. He never entered into a fight without it being clearly the fault of the other boy. He was fond of horses ; we rode usually without a saddle, a blanket being strapped on the back of the horse, and without stirrups. In childhood he was a sturdy little fellow, never boisterous. Without being slothful or inert, he had not that superabundant flow of animal spirits which impels many boys to "stand on their heads," yell vociferously, and do many disagreeable things from thoughtlessness, apparently arising from great vitality.

A small brick school-house stood on a hill some three hundred yards from the court-house, near which we lived. It had two rooms, the one for the girls, the other for the boys.

Writing from Pau, France, General Grant says of this period of our lives :

"PAU, FRANCE, *December 6, 1878.*

"MY DEAR ADMIRAL :

"On my arrival here last night I found a very large mail, and in it two letters from you. This is the first mail since leaving Gibraltar, from whence I wrote you. At that time I had fully determined not to go by India, China, and Japan, and so wrote the Secretary of the Navy—saying, however, that if I determined otherwise before the departure of the 'Richmond' from America, I would cable him. This morning I sent him a dispatch that I would accept his offer of a passage on that steamer. I could not say much in a dispatch, but I hope we will be able to join the steamer on the north side of the Mediterranean, somewhere between Marseilles and Palermo. This will extend my trip and make my arrival in America some months later than I had expected, probably extending the time into late fall. Of course, going by San Francisco, I shall want to spend at least a month going over old ground with which I was familiar a quarter of a century ago. That quarter of a century does not seem half so long as the one which preceded it, and passed since you and I first received instruction under John D. White and *a long beech switch* cut generally by the boys for their own chastisement.

"Mrs. Grant wants me to say now that she regrets your retirement, because you might [otherwise] accompany us, and she has every confidence in you on your native element. I believe you are a first-class farmer besides.

"I have not yet received your paper on the 'interoceanic canal,' but will read it with great interest when it reaches me.

"I had preserved with great care a letter you wrote me as much as nine months ago, giving the route and places to visit on naval vessels after leaving the Red Sea, until since leaving Gibraltar; but I destroyed it a few days ago. I would be very glad to get a repetition of it now.

"I am very sorry, with Mrs. Grant, that you cannot be the commander on our proposed trip, and that Mrs. Ammen is not to be with us. . . ."

I left that locality in November, 1836, and did not meet my old companion again until June, 1843. He had just graduated at the Military Academy, and, passing through Philadelphia, had kindly arranged a meeting at Jones' Hotel, near Seventh, on Chestnut street, Philadelphia. He was then a stoutly built, round-faced youth, twenty-one years of age on the 27th of the preceding April. Our next meeting was at Culpepper Court House, Virginia, where I went on the 1st of May, 1864, just as he was on the point of crossing the Rapidan. He had been at Hampton Roads some weeks before, and, speaking with Admiral Lee, expressed a desire to see me at head-quarters. I was then at Norfolk on a court of inquiry. Previous to this I had shown the admiral a letter which I had received in reply to one of my own. It has never appeared in print, and will be read with interest :

“NASHVILLE, TENN., *February 16, 1864.*

“DEAR AMMEN :

“Your letter was duly received and advice fully appreciated, particularly as it is the same I would give any friend ; *i. e.*, to avoid all political entanglements. I have always thought the most slavish life any man could lead was that of a politician. Besides, I do not believe any man can be successful as a soldier whilst he has an anchor ahead for other advancement. I know of no circumstances likely to arise which could induce me to accept of any political office whatever. My only desire will be, as it has been, to whip out the rebellion in the shortest way possible, and to retain as high a position in the army afterward as the Administration then in power may think me suitable for.

“I was truly glad to hear from you. I was once on leave of absence at the same time you were, and went from Clermont County to Cincinnati more to see you than for any other purpose. When I got there, found you had gone to Ripley by river. I believe the last time we met was in Philadelphia, in 1843. We have both grown older since, though time sets very lightly with me. I am neither gray nor bald, nor do I feel any different from what I did at twenty-five. I have often wished you had been selected to command the Mississippi flotilla. I have no fault to find, however, with the naval officers who have co-operated with me. I think Porter, Phelps, and some of the younger officers, as clever men as I ever fell in with. I cannot complain of them, certainly, for I believe I never made a request of them they did not comply with, no matter what the danger. I know I caused Porter to lose one gunboat against his judgment, and he never found fault.

“Remember me to Mrs. Vandyke's family, and any other friends of mine in Cincinnati. I will be very glad to hear from you again.

“Yours truly,

“U. S. GRANT.”

The opportunity to visit General Grant occurred on being detached from the temporary command of a vessel. A note stating

my desire to pay him a visit, if it suited his convenience, was followed by the receipt of the requisite military pass. On my arrival at Culpepper the General received me very kindly, reminded me that it was nearly twenty-one years since we had met at Philadelphia, and turned me over to Colonel Badeau, who was an old acquaintance, and suggested that we should take a ride. We were soon mounted, and, accompanied by several other officers, rode to the summit of Pony Hill, some three miles distant to the southwest, from whence we could see the field-works of the enemy across the Rapidan.

About ten o'clock, the hour the General informed me he would be at leisure, he sent for me. We were alone until some time after midnight. He spoke of our boyhood, of the persons whom we knew in common, and, later, concerning army movements. Not an inconsiderable object of my visit, although not at all official, was to assure an effective co-operation of our naval forces. I had been authorized by Admiral Lee to say to the General that, apart from the force requisite for the maintenance of the blockade on the coast of North Carolina, all other vessels under his command would be subordinated, as far as desired, to support army movements in any manner suggested.

Breakfasting with the General and his staff the following morning, he proposed a ride with me. We were accompanied by one orderly. The course chosen was first to the north-east, and after some miles passed over, turning to the right. The country was an undulating plain, almost denuded of wood and wholly destitute of fences. Here and there were encamped the different army corps that composed a principal part of the force that was about to cross the Rapidan. The General rode the finest horse, as he told me then and afterwards, that he had ever mounted—a large, powerful bay, with a free, easy stride of great scope. This horse was the half-brother of the famous “Lexington,” and was named “Cincinnati.” The General spoke of his intended movement, that our army in the valley was already on the march, and told me that on the following day, as I returned to Washington, I would meet Burnside’s corps. He did not feel at liberty to give the number of troops that would move on Richmond. The force, however, was as large as he thought himself able to command, bearing in mind the difficulties of the country for transportation. Were the troops with their supply trains to be placed along the line of road to Richmond, which I

think he gave as seventy miles, the head of the army would be at Richmond before the rear had crossed the Rapidan. He added humorously that he did not expect to reach Richmond in that order.

In reply to my inquiry, he said that he supposed that he had very reliable information of the forces of General Lee. As I remember, he reckoned them at 120,000 men, including the militia or local forces in Richmond and Petersburg. He did not regard General Lee as the ablest general of the South; he, however, possessed the entire confidence, respect, and indeed affection of every one under his command, and such a man could not be an indifferent commander to meet. He considered General Joseph E. Johnston as a superior and very able commander, and Bragg, if regarded simply in the light of a soldier, he thought very able; he was, however, so thoroughly detested by the people of the South that he would never prove a formidable adversary.

After a ride of some two hours or more, passing over probably twelve or fifteen miles, we approached Culpepper from the general direction of Pony Hill. As we passed another army corps, the General remarked, with something in manner akin to enthusiasm, that there was the most thoroughly equipped army for field-work that he thought could be found on the globe. He would do the best he could with it. Newspapers state that officers have said, Give me this or that number of troops, and they would do this or that; but he could only promise to do his best. He said, further, that some of our officers, after an engagement, thought it impossible to move on until they were again thoroughly prepared, apparently forgetful that the enemy was making the best use of his time also. The result of an engagement was often only a question of relative exhaustion of resources; if the enemy's forces were worse off than his own, as the result of a battle, he saw no reason why the enemy should not be pressed at once, notwithstanding actual deficiencies of his own preparation.

Two or three days after I left the General he crossed the Rapidan, and I had not the pleasure of meeting him again until the evening of the day of the review of General Sherman's army in Washington, after the close of the war. He wrote me from City Point, August 18th, 1864, principally in relation to the explosion of the mine of Petersburg. Shortly after that date I saw a published letter from him to some one else very similar in import, and indeed

in some parts almost identical in words. The following extracts will probably interest the reader :

“Several times we have had decisive victories within our grasp, but let them, through accident or fault, slip through our hands. Our movement from Cold Harbor to the south side of the James was made with such celerity, that before the enemy got a single regiment across the river our forces had carried the fortifications east of Petersburg. There was nothing, not even a military force, to prevent our walking in and taking possession. The officer charged with this work, for some unaccountable reason, stopped at the works he had captured, and gave the enemy time to get in a garrison and to intrench it. On the 30th of July, again by a feint north of the James, we drew most of the enemy to that side of the river, and whilst he was there (with my troops quietly withdrawn during the night) a mine, judiciously prepared, was exploded, burying a battery and some three hundred of the enemy, and making a breach in his works into which our men marched without opposition. The enemy was completely surprised, and commenced running in all directions. There was nothing to prevent our men from marching directly to the high ground in front of them, to which they had been directed to go. Once there, all the enemy’s fortifications would have been taken in reverse, and no stand would have been made. It is clear that without a loss of five hundred men we could have had Petersburg with all its artillery and many of the garrison. But our troops stopped in the crater made by the explosion. The enemy was given time to rally and re-occupy his line. Then we found, true enough, that we had the wolf by the ears. He was hard to hold, and more dangerous to let go. This was so outrageous that I have obtained a court of inquiry to sift the matter. We will peg away, however, and end this matter if our people at home will but be true to themselves. If they would but reflect, everything looks favorable. . . .

“The hope of a counter-revolution over the draft or the Presidential election keeps them together. Then, too, they hope for the election of a ‘peace candidate,’ who would let them go. ‘A peace at any price’ is fearful to contemplate. It would be but the beginning of war. The demands of the South would know no limits. They would demand indemnity for expenses incurred in carrying on the war. They would demand the return of all their

slaves set free in consequence of war. They would demand a treaty looking to the rendition of all fugitive slaves escaping into the Northern States, and they would keep on demanding until it would be better to be dead than to submit longer. . . .”

During the winter of 1865-66 General Grant was domiciled in Washington. My duties at that time were at that navy-yard, in command of a vessel of war. I saw him there almost daily. We had an idea in common—that the narrow parts of the American continent should be sufficiently examined to ascertain the practicability of a ship canal from sea to sea, or the reverse. Rear-Admiral Davis, then Superintendent of the Naval Observatory, had an old Spanish map of that region enlarged, with coast lines put in with the best geographical determinations. After many examinations of this and such other information as was readily obtainable, General Grant paid a visit to the Secretary of State several times, on one occasion taking me with him. Finally, he told me that he would not go to see Mr. Seward again in relation to this matter ; he felt satisfied, should he do so, that he would hate Mr. Seward, and he was not disposed to put himself into a position to make him hate any man.

After taking leave of Washington, in April, I did not see General Grant until the famous “swinging around the circle” of President Johnson, accompanied by himself and Admiral Farragut, passing through York, Pennsylvania, where I then lived. General Grant kindly sent me a telegram to meet him on the car, when he expressed to me very freely his disgust at this tour, which was no less distasteful to Admiral Farragut than to himself.

In the summer and autumn of 1867 my duties again took me to Washington for short periods, at which times I was usually an inmate of General Grant’s house. On one of these occasions, not long after the forced resignation or dismissal of Mr. Stanton from the position of Secretary of War, General Grant informed me that, much against his inclination, he had consented to accept the position of Acting Secretary of War, a controlling reason being, that he feared the President might otherwise appoint some unscrupulous person, whose approval, under existing laws, of fraudulent cotton claims, might rob the treasury of \$200,000,000, or even more. Perhaps the following morning, certainly within a day or so, General Sherman, then stationed at St. Louis, made his appearance in General Grant’s house at a very early hour. As soon as

General Grant dressed he came down-stairs, and in a humorous way said : " Why, Sherman, what on earth are you doing here ? You know very well that, under existing laws, you cannot leave St. Louis without my order." " Oh, yes," said Sherman, with a merry twinkle in his eye, " I know that very well ; but the President sent me a telegram to come on, and I am here to see you to know what is up. I rely greatly on your clemency in violating the law." I have never made inquiry since then, of General Grant or of General Sherman, of what " was up " at that time.

Later in the season, when from time to time I was in Washington, General Grant kindly invited me to a drive with him in his buggy, and expressed at times great distrust of the intentions or rather designs of Mr. Johnson. In the autumn, on one of these drives, he said he felt sure that nothing but the cowardice of the President stood in the way of very serious events. He had become aware of a secret military organization in Maryland, and had accurate information at that time of its ramifications, through General —. The Governor of Maryland had made requisitions on the War Department for field artillery to which, under existing laws, the State was entitled ; but knowing as he did the intended revolutionary purpose, he had simply pigeon-holed the requisitions. For a time he thought of writing the Governor that he had his eye on him, but on the whole he concluded not to do so. In Virginia, too, there were signs of a support, but so far no organization existed ; the intention was inchoate in development. Farther south there were no indications of disturbance.

Early in December my duties brought me again to Washington for a day. Meeting General Grant near the War Department, he invited me to his room. Seeing that he had a careworn look, I asked him how matters were progressing. He said, " Badly enough ; I will not be surprised at anything that may occur. Within a few days the President paid me a visit of an hour or more, speaking on indifferent subjects, and, just before leaving, said : ' General, there is one point upon which I feel a deep interest, and that is, in the event of an open rupture between Congress and myself, where will you be found ? ' The reply was," said the General to me with great earnestness : " ' That will depend entirely upon which was the revolutionary party.' "

I dined with the General that day, and he was good enough to drive me to the railroad depot when I was leaving the city. Be-

fore we parted he expressed his regret that thus far he had not been able to forward the examination of the isthmuses, for the purpose of ascertaining the practicability of a ship canal. I replied, "That makes little difference, General; I feel assured that sooner or later you will be able to bring this about." In a few days I was at sea for the Asiatic station.

I returned to the United States in April, 1869. The General was good enough to request that I should be ordered home, after his election to the Presidency in November, 1868. I find in my package only two letters from him during my absence. One, dated November 23, contains the following :

"DEAR AMMEN :

"Your welcome and very interesting letters up to September have been received. . . . Appearances now are about what they were in '65. I would write you a long letter on public and home affairs but that I hope you will be on your way home soon after the receipt of this, if you are not before. . . ."

Upon my arrival in Washington I was assigned to duty, and remained in that city during the two Presidential terms of General Grant. My residence being in the country, General Grant was good enough to give me a general invitation to dine with him on Sunday when it suited my convenience. This I did monthly, more frequently twice a month, and usually before dinner took a walk with him, at times five or six miles in length, and rarely less than half that distance. He spoke freely on many matters upon which he is supposed to have been silent. In all my intercourse with him I have no recollection of his uttering what seemed an ill-digested expression; he was a man essentially of ideas. With me and with others by whom he would not be misunderstood, or his language repeated and afterwards perverted, he was not at all a "silent man." Although I have no recollection of his ever saying to me that he did not wish publicity to be given to what he had said, yet on many occasions I felt that I would have betrayed an implied confidence, as in the case of what has been stated above in regard to the Governor of Maryland, and of his conversation with President Johnson. In the White House, Johnson was spoken of on one occasion. I expressed some surprise that it had not found its way into the newspapers preceding the Presidential election. He said it did not, simply because he had never mentioned it, except to General Comstock and myself.

Soon after he became President I asked what he thought was the political effect of the assassination of President Lincoln. He replied, with great feeling, that it was the greatest possible calamity to the country, and especially to the people of the South. Had Mr. Lincoln lived, his great ability and tact would, he thought, have very soon reconciled and adjusted all possible differences, and the country would have been spared long years of mismanagement and misunderstanding.

On one of our Sunday walks we met two gentlemen, one of whom introduced the other to the General. The one introduced told the General that he knew him when he kept Knight's Ferry, near Stockton, in California. The General smiled, and replied that he had met a great number of people who told him they knew him when he kept that ferry. We passed on, and our conversation was resumed without any comment in relation to these gentlemen or what had been said. Had any one asked me whether General Grant had kept that ferry, I certainly would have replied affirmatively. On the return of General Grant, after his tour around the world, he visited Stockton in the autumn of 1879, and in a short, humorous address said that he had met hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people who had told him they knew him when he kept the ferry near that city. There must be some mistake about it, nevertheless, he said, as he had never visited that locality but once before, and on that occasion had staid over night only.

The Presidency gave him great annoyance. On one occasion he said to me that if he knew capable, honest men in Louisiana, who would accept office, he would appoint them, whether Republicans or Democrats. Being Democrats did not in his belief make them honest, and therefore he had not gone out of his party. I said that a native of Louisiana, and at that time a resident, had told me that he did not think there was any political honesty in that State in either party.

I feel quite sure that General Grant would have felt greatly relieved had he never been proposed for the Presidency. After his election for a second term he said that he felt gratified at a re-nomination, as it indicated an approval of his first term. During his army service, nor at any other time, had he ever solicited, directly or indirectly, military or civil preferment. I feel warranted in expressing the belief that at the period when his political friends insisted upon his candidacy for a third term he would have felt

grateful to them had they proposed any other person who would have been generally acceptable.

During his Presidency he took great personal interest in the progress of all of the surveys touching the practicability of an interoceanic canal across this continent, and when these surveys eliminated from commercial consideration the different proposed routes other than Nicaragua and Panama, he directed a close instrumental survey of the latter when informed by the Canal Commission, appointed by him under a Congressional resolution, that this survey was essential to a relative consideration of the merits of the two routes. When these surveys were completed he carefully examined the results, and fully agreed with the Commission that the Nicaragua route so far surpassed the Panama in economic conditions of construction and in other commercial advantages as to settle beyond a doubt the question of where the canal should and ultimately will be, as extracts from letters written by him abroad will show in the pages following.

During all the years of his Presidency I was most kindly, I may say affectionately, received at the White House, and was there at such times as he had his recreations. His table was supplied with the wines usual with persons of position. During the earlier years of his administration he partook, but not at all freely, of what he furnished his guests. The winter preceding the expiration of his last term he was actually abstinent at his own table, and, I have every reason to believe, entirely so. Yet during that period one or more of the Washington Sunday newspapers, and other vile prints, informed the people of the disgrace they were suffering because of their besotted President, who was to be seen daily reeling through the streets! During all of these years I never saw General Grant in a condition that would give rise even to a suspicion that he had indulged too freely in liquors, and only on one occasion have I ever had a glass of liquor in the White House. On one of the many Sundays that General Grant invited me to walk before dinner, the weather was raw and the wind high. On coming into the house the General proposed a glass of liquor, and, going into the dining-room, we were waited on by the steward. Many of the friends and admirers of General Grant will read this statement with gratification, and the more if they know me personally. They will at least feel assured that I would not present even a specious statement, much less an untruth, however much I might feel interested

in the good name of any one. May not the gentlemen of the press well consider whether it would not be far better to do justice to the living than to adulate the dead? Adulation then cannot recompense the wronged, nor can "flattery soothe the dull, cold ear of death."

Soon after the expiration of his last term, in April, 1877, General Grant kindly asked me to accompany him to Ohio, to visit the home of our childhood. At Cincinnati we were the guests of Washington McLean, Esq., a gentleman properly known far and wide. From thence the General drove to Georgetown, a distance of forty miles. We were received in the kindest manner by all of the inhabitants, more especially by those who knew us as children. We then took leave, as it were, of the past scenes of childhood—dear as they must be to every honest heart—and of those who knew us as boys, however humble they might be, as well as of those with whom our association had been more intimate.

Before General Grant went abroad, which was one month later, he told me that he had called on the President and urged upon him prompt action looking to the construction of the Nicaragua Canal.

During his absence he was good enough to write me from time to time. Quotations from these letters may interest the reader, even though he has read the charming book of John Russell Young, who accompanied him during the greater part of his travels.

From London, August 26th, 1877, he writes :

"I arrived here from the continent yesterday, after a most pleasant visit of about seven weeks there, most of the time in Switzerland. There is no more beautiful scenery or climate for summer travel than Switzerland presents. The people are industrious and honest, simple and frugal in their habits, and would be very poor for all this if it were not for the travel through their country. I wish their surplus population would emigrate to the United States. . . .

"For the past eight weeks I have seen but few American papers, and am consequently behind the home news. The foreign papers, however, have been full of the great railroad strike, no doubt exaggerated, as bad as it was. The United States should always be prepared to put down such demonstrations promptly, and with severe consequences to the guilty. I hope good may come out of this in pointing out the necessity for having the proper remedy at hand in case of need. 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'"

From Nice, France, December 10th, he writes :

"MY DEAR ADMIRAL:

"On Thursday, day after to-morrow, we go on board the "Vandalia," to

make our excursion of the Mediterranean. How much I wish you were in command, to unfurl for the first time your admiral's flag. . . ."

Writing of meeting the officers on board, he continues :

"Of course I told I owed you an old grudge as being responsible for the many trials and difficulties I had passed through in the last half century, for nearly that length of time ago you had rescued me from a watery grave. I am of a forgiving nature, however, and forgive you—but is the feeling universal? If the Democrats get into full power, may they not hold you responsible! But as you are about retiring, I hope no harm will come to you for any act of kindness done to me. Our trip thus far has been most agreeable. The weather in Paris was most atrocious, but I got to see much of the people. My opinion of their capacity for self-government has materially changed since seeing for myself. Before coming here I did not believe the French people capable of self-government. Now I believe them perfectly capable, and that they will be satisfied with nothing less. They are patient, 'and of long-suffering,' but there will not be entire peace and quiet until a form of government is established in which all the people have a full voice. It will be more republican than anything they have had under the name of a Republic."

DANIEL AMMEN.

(To be concluded.)